

HIS

Nature

For this reason a man will leave his
father and mother . . .

GENESIS 2:24

ENDURING LOVE

If we plunge three miles (5,000 meters) beneath the surface of the western Pacific Ocean, we find a sponge—the Venus' flower basket (*Euplectella aspergillum*)—with a most amazing architecture. Improbable as it may be, God weaves together microscopic strands of delicate glass to form the body of this mysterious creature!

This satiny sponge extracts dissolved silica (sand) from the surrounding sea water to produce the world's strongest and most complex glass structure—natural or man-made. The framework of the Venus' flower basket has modern builders baffled. Like all sponges, this deep-sea denizen has no brain, eyes, or hands but is able to apply “advanced textbook engineering” to its own construction.



Venus' Flower Basket

In actuality, it is Christ our Creator who performs this seemingly impossible feat, taking a brittle material and fashioning a strong and beautiful animal. God cements a total of seven glassy layers—horizontal, vertical, and diagonal—to form the incredibly tenacious fabric of its body. The complexity of its anatomy is what holds the secret to this sponge's remarkable ability to withstand the crushing pressures at

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the bottom of the ocean, which scientists have estimated to be greater than three tons per square inch!

The glass strands that comprise the scaffolding of the stunning Venus' flower basket also have fiber optic properties and are more durable than the best materials used in the telecommunications industry. Not surprisingly, engineers are scrambling to duplicate the fiber's design.

Inside this creature we find yet another jaw-dropping surprise. A young male and female shrimp (*Spongicola japonica*) often enter through its fine mesh and spend the rest of their lives hunkered down within its hollow interior. This gossamer sponge protects the couple from predators and feeds its guests by trapping food in its lacy, netlike walls. In exchange, they keep their mansion clean. Once the shrimp grow to adulthood, they are unable to leave.

The shrimps' home has been described by some as a "cage" or a "prison," but it's a matter of perspective. Many see it as a "glass palace" and an illustration of marriage. For years, dried specimens

of the Venus' flower basket have been given as wedding gifts to young couples in Japan as a symbol of marital fidelity and permanence.

Immersed in the icy blackness of the ocean depths, the fairyland quality of this unlikely living parable is augmented because our Lord Jesus gives each shrimp the ability to glow in the dark! Some marine biologists speculate that the shrimp's bioluminescence, coupled with the sponge's remarkable light-transmitting properties, creates a breathtaking glass lantern illuminating the deep sea.

God graciously cares for his creation and through the Venus' flower basket gives us a marvelous model of marriage—a safe haven from the crushing influences of the world, fragile yet enduring!

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Published by Jim Kraus, designed by Mary Pappas, edited by Rick Destree. Copyright © 2011 HIS NATURE, issue 09. *His Nature* is published monthly by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 351 Executive Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188. Printed in the USA. Subscription \$12 per month per 100 copies. Canada: \$14 per 100 per month. Photo courtesy of www.tellmewhereonearth.com. All rights reserved.
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For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

EPHESIANS 5:31